

# IN THE WORLD

## ISRAEL

# A walk on the crooked line of Labor opposition

By David Mandel

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**W**HEN PUBLIC DEBATE about the Israeli government's aims in Lebanon began a week or two after the invasion, the verbal battles generally shaped up along anticipated lines. The doves and hawks were, for the most part, the same doves and hawks who regularly spar over the Palestinian question, the occupied territories, settlements and the prospects of various peace and war plans.

If anything, several usually dovish-leaning Israeli politicians quietly folded their banners after a brief flurry of criticism, in deference to "the winds of public opinion," as former UN ambassador Chaim Herzog put it. Abba Eban, for instance, has been unusually silent. And as the siege of Beirut continues well into its second month, many Israelis who were at first horrified by the idea of marching into the city are now more open to calls for "finishing the job."

In such an atmosphere, harsh criticism of the military campaign by freshman Labor parliamentarian Mordechai Gur was one of the few surprises in the political center. It was particularly surprising in light of Gur's previous job as chief of staff of Israel's armed forces. He held this post in 1978 when Israel last mounted a large-scale invasion of Lebanon, also aimed at clearing the northern border of the threat of terrorist attacks and shelling by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The most paradoxical—to anyone unfamiliar with the Labor Party's tribulations in trying to mount a "loyal opposition" to policies officially justified by "security"—was Gur's request during the first days of the war for an emergency army post in which he could contribute to the military effort. (The offer was turned down because law and custom forbid such co-option of high-level politicians.)

Gur has often been accused of weaving a crooked line in his short political career, which began, for all practical purposes, in November 1977. When still chief of staff, he publicly warned on the eve of Anwar Sadat's first visit to Jerusalem that the Egyptian president might actually be planning a surprise attack. The comment caused great embarrassment to Sadat's hosts, and Israeli premier Menachem Begin still spares no opportunity to remind Gur of what now looks like a gigantic faux pas.

But Gur claims that his positions have been perfectly consistent, both in themselves and with Labor Party views on the questions at issue. Upon examination, his claim seems justified, considering that Labor contains a wide range of views, and the more debatable accusation by its critics on both sides that if kernels of consensus can be distilled from the party platform, they themselves are at best paradoxical.

The retired lieutenant-general has no trouble explaining his apparent flip-flop on the current war: "For more than a year, we had been warning the government that its policy was making war inevitable. Relatively minor incursions on

other borders were followed by massive bombing raids," and despite the cease-fire between Israel and the PLO after the largest exchange in July 1981, "bellicose statements and brinkmanship here triggered reactions on the other side."

Especially blameworthy in Gur's eyes is Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, a long-time army rival who was bypassed for the top military job when Labor ruled the country. Several times in late 1981, the now opposition deputy aroused Sharon's wrath by publicly accusing him of looking for an excuse to go to war.

Why then the initial support for "Operation Peace for Galilee"?

"There are two sides to any war," Gur explains, and in this case, "the PLO, too, adopted a policy that together with Israel's, did in fact make war inevitable."

He dismisses the army's professed surprise at discovering vast quantities of PLO arms in southern Lebanon. "We knew very well, especially about their heavy weapons. But the last year's massive build-up was nevertheless real, and while it did not constitute a direct military threat to Israel's existence, it would seriously have limited our ability to react to terror attacks across other borders or abroad."

While Gur admits that he holds the Begin government at fault for not pursuing possible political settlements to the Palestinian conflict, "which alone could solve the terror problem," he still holds

that given the situation that developed, a move to push the PLO cannons farther from the border had to be supported.

"I oppose in principle a war that is fought for any reason but legitimate self-defense," Gur says, "and it very quickly became clear that Begin and Sharon had concrete political goals in Lebanon. Therefore, as soon as the first cease-fire was declared, we went public in opposition."

### Agreement with Syria.

Gur suggests that an unwritten arrangement could have been concluded with Syria to prevent PLO attacks from the border region of Lebanon, and recalls a similar missed opportunity during the 1978 invasion: "Syria's military presence in Lebanon is an established fact—it entered by invitation of the government. Its absence from the south is only because of Israel's vociferous refusal to accept that. But if our real interest is to stabilize the situation and prevent terror attacks, why not let the Syrians take that responsibility? They have scrupulously observed the 1974 disengagement agreement in the Golan Heights, and do not allow the PLO to operate there, since they have too much to lose."

"In 1978," he continues, "I advised Begin to resist the establishment of a UN force and instead to seek such an understanding with Damascus. It did not happen, to a large extent because of American pressure. But this time, Reagan, unlike Carter back then, did not interfere with our operation or quickly turn to the UN. Our declared goal was a 40-kilometer buffer zone; in the Eastern sector, the Syrian army was sitting well within that range, and I believe that after we advanced in the west such an arrangement could have been achieved. Another link of interdependence might have been established with an important neighbor."

"We met with Begin during the first days of the war and advised such a course. He even proposed the idea in his June 9 Parliament speech, before Syria's involvement was certain. But hours

## Mordechai Gur has publicly accused Sharon of provocation.



Defense Minister Ariel Sharon (above) is a long-time rival of Labor parliamentarian Mordechai Gur.

later, our jets were attacking the Syrian's positions and anti-aircraft missile batteries, which it turned out constituted no threat to us at all."

Gur distinguishes between two aspects of the Palestinian national movement—the military-terror side of the PLO, "which must be fought by all military means at our disposal," and the political side, "which demands a political solution." He endorses Labor's offer to negotiate "with any Palestinians who recognize Israel and renounce terror," but unlike many others who view the formulation mostly as a public relations slogan to justify their refusal to deal with the PLO, Gur really means it. Last September, he raised a storm in the party by specifically offering to talk with Yasir Arafat...if the conditions were met. "We and the Palestinians were born to live together in the same territory," Gur said at the time.

When asked about recent indications that the PLO might be willing to recognize Israel, Gur dismisses Western enthusiasm at the prospect as "wishful thinking." So far, the talk of "accepting a UN resolution on the Palestinian question" sounds like "formalistic double talk, since it does not spell out willingness to abandon terror and to rescind clauses in the Palestinian National Covenant that imply that Israel must not exist." Nevertheless, he reiterates a sincere willingness to meet with Arafat, and when pressed on the formalistic-sounding nature of his own demand that the covenant be changed (moderate Palestinian spokesmen generally claim that the importance of the "outdated" document is overblown by Israelis seeking an excuse not to deal with the PLO), the general shows flexibility: The required PLO policy declaration could take other forms instead, "as long as it is authoritative, clear and explicit about recognition of Israel and the substitution from now on of political for military struggle."

But what incentive is there for the PLO to take such a step when Gur's position is a minority even among the Labor opposition, most of which comes close to the Likud in categorically refusing to recognize anything but the Palestinian movement's violent facet? And what might there be to talk about when Labor's platform also insists that there be no independent Palestinian state, and that Israel keep significant parts of the West Bank (the Jordan Valley, the Etzion Bloc and East Jerusalem)?

Gur's reply is refreshingly undogmatic; though he too opposes Palestinian independence between Jordan and Israel and attaches significant strategic importance to the aforementioned parts of the West Bank, he foresees the possibility of a process similar to what occurred with Sinai after Sadat's dramatic peace initiative.

But total withdrawal from the West Bank would "endanger Israel's existence," Gur insists in response to a question about the ultra-dovish views of another ex-general, Mattityahu Peled, who stresses that in conditions of modern warfare, the relationships prevailing across a border, and not its location, determine the country's security. A minute later, however, he admits that "ideologically, Peled is correct, though there is still a definite connection between borders and military tactics."

Clearly, Mordechai Gur is unwilling to advocate withdrawal from territories in which the Labor Party sponsored large-scale settlement. But his tone in addressing the subject puts him squarely within the highly polarized party's dovish minority, lending it a potential leader of significant personal stature.

While Labor hawks and its centrist leaders like Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin are in virtual support of the government's policy, Gur sees his Party's platform as representing an "opening position," should negotiations with Syria, Jordan or the Palestinians take place.

His attitude is not merely a personal statement, but perhaps a prediction. "Let (Syrian President Hafez) Assad or the PLO come forth the way Sadat did," he suggests, "and I promise, there will be a new atmosphere in Israel." ■

## FRANCE

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

IT HAPPENED EARLY IN THE AFTERNOON of August 9, in a picturesque old Jewish neighborhood in the heart of Paris. Two well-dressed gunmen suddenly appeared at one end of the narrow, lively Rue des Rosiers and began firing away calmly as they proceeded up the street.

They made a short stop at Goldenberg's famous Jewish restaurant, lobbing in grenades and spraying customers and employees with submachine-gun fire. They continued in this manner to the end of the street and then vanished, in a white car driven by an accomplice according to some witnesses, on foot according to others. Behind them lay six dead, including two American tourists, and 22 wounded, some critically.

This was more than enough to revive ancestral fears in the Jewish community. By evening, the local people's cries in the streets had gone from shock to fury. They yelled at the journalists who converged on the scene as if their coverage of the war in Lebanon was responsible for stirring up anti-Semitism in France. When President Francois Mitterrand arrived, accompanied by Interior Minister Gaston Defferre, to attend a memorial service that evening in the local synagogue, his statement of horror at the anti-Semitic crime was nearly drowned out by chants of "Mitterrand assassin!"

Was this what the killers were after? Most French political commentators thought so.

The reactions of the people in the Rue des Rosiers were, predictably and understandably, highly emotional. But the crime itself was committed with cold calculation. This was not an American-style screwball crime, where some isolated nut goes berserk and kills everyone in sight. All witnesses were struck by the easy professionalism of the killers. They behaved like guns for hire.

So the question being asked all over France is "Who profits from the crime?"

In Israel, Prime Minister Menachem Begin lost no time issuing a statement. "Again the cry 'Death to the Jews' can be heard in the streets of Paris as it was during the time of the Dreyfus affair," he claimed. "I am proud to be the head of democratic Israel, but above all I am a Jew. If France does not prevent the appearance of neo-Nazi manifestations, of murder of Jews just because they are Jews, I will not hesitate as a Jew to call upon our young people living in France to actively defend the lives of Jews and their human dignity."

This semi-veiled threat to instigate illegal armed action on French territory caused almost universal outrage in France. It is simply untrue that anything like the cry "Death to the Jews" can be heard in the streets of Paris. Begin seemed to be willfully confusing an act of anonymous terrorism, in all probability guided from abroad, with the pogroms of other times and places. If "young Jews" living in France heeded a Begin call to "active defense," what would they do? Who is their adversary? The large Arab population of France?

In Paris, Begin's statement sounded like a threat to export the Middle Eastern Arab-Israeli war to France, unless France kept its nose out of Lebanon.

Begin's statement even indirectly accused Mitterrand himself and the French press for the Rue des Rosiers slaughter. "The crime committed in Paris is the result of shocking statements about 'Oradours' and the thoughtless statements of the French press about the war in Lebanon," he declared.

This was an allusion to Mitterrand's rather embarrassed answer to a Palestinian journalist's question at a Budapest press conference in July. When the French president was asked why, if he condemned the Nazi massacre of French civilians in the village of Oradour, he didn't condemn the "Oradours" committed by Israel in Lebanon, he had an-



A son of one of the victims of the Rue des Rosiers terrorism is comforted.

## Gunmen's attack shocks Jews—and incites Begin

Throughout the country, people are asking, "Who really profits from the crime?"

answered, in a rather rambling manner, that of course he would always condemn all "Oradours" wherever they occurred.

The French press found nothing in the exchange worth reporting. But it caused a sensation in Israel, where Mitterrand was represented as having raised the comparison with Oradour. The Israeli cabinet sent an official protest to Paris, which the French government refused to accept.

Mitterrand's trip to Israel, his lifelong pro-Jewish sentiments and pro-Israeli policies apparently were all in vain. Israeli leaders appeared almost relieved to "discover" that Mitterrand, too, was probably anti-Semitic. And, at least in Begin's view, if someone is "anti-Semitic," he has no right to criticize anything the State of Israel may do.

The reaction in France to the Rue des Rosiers massacre was different from the reaction to the bomb explosion near a synagogue in the Rue Copernic in Paris on Oct. 3, 1980, that killed four passers-by. In both cases, there was the same shock, revulsion, universal condemnation. But after Rue Copernic, some initial suspicion was directed against the French right.

Unlike Mitterrand, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing did not rush to the scene to show his sympathy, and his government seemed worried that enquiry might turn up eventual complicity between rightist thugs and the police. This suspicion played a role in the political downfall of Giscard.

But several important things have changed. Today the left government is above any suspicion of shielding neo-Nazi conspirators. If, in fact, the crimi-

nals had accomplices in the French police or far right, they were clearly working against the left government. Terrorism and the "strategy of tension"—in France as in other countries before—can be expected to be exploited politically by the right to call for a "strong government" that puts "law and order" ahead of concern for rights and liberties.

Also, the only substantial clues retained in the Rue Copernic bombing have pointed to the Middle East, not to French neo-Nazi or anti-Semitic extremists. At the time, an anonymous telephone caller had claimed the attack was the work of a tiny neo-Nazi group called FANE (Federation d'Action Nationaliste et Européenne). But the anonymous caller turned out to be Jean-Yves Pelay, a half-Jewish French Foreign Legion Veteran who revealed that he had infiltrated FANE a few months earlier at the request of a Jewish civic organization. Pelay was quickly promoted to be head of FANE's guards, a position he skillfully used to get the organization into so much trouble it was soon banned by the government. He told interviewers in November 1980 that he had found FANE to be a bunch of incompetent dingbats, who had nothing to do with Rue Copernic, although some of the members had been involved in unrelated attacks on Arabs and leftist bookstores.

### A break in solidarity.

Meanwhile, the war in Lebanon has unquestionably been changing attitudes. In France as in the U.S., the invasion of Lebanon has broken the solidarity of Jews with Israel.

The break is anything but neat. Actually, it is a sort of shattering—a desolate fragmentation.

The Rue des Rosiers only makes the divisions in the diaspora more sharp and painful. After Rue Copernic, there were mass demonstrations of condemnation bringing together the whole spectrum of Jewish groups with left and humanitarian organizations. After Rue des Rosiers, this was not possible. But the condemnation is just as unanimous. The gap however, is unbridgeable between those whose response is to cheer for Be-

gin and Sharon, and those who, still discreetly, are assailed by the horrible suspicion that, in one way or another, Begin and Sharon themselves are partly responsible.

French journalists have reacted indignantly to accusations that their coverage of Lebanon has revived anti-Semitism. "Come into the studios and see for yourself the footage we are getting from Beirut," a TV reporter retorted to an angry group of Zionists. "The images are so terrible we censor them ourselves." French news professionals are aware that they gave play to events such as Israeli bombing of French diplomatic quarters and newsrooms in Beirut. Yet one attack nearly wiped out the entire staff of the French news agency AFP in what Paris considered well-aimed shots meant to express General Sharon's displeasure with French policy.

The danger of a new anti-Semitism is present, and this is what those Jews feel viscerally when they attack the media. The bombardment of Beirut, day after day, has been using up the benefit of the doubt according to Israel, just as it has been using up non-Jews' sense of guilt toward Jews. The process is probably irreversible. It is all the more dangerous in that, because of the guilt, people have been and indeed still are reluctant to express their criticism, which is building up a resentment that could explode one day.

### Too close to home.

This resentment will not just go away, because Europe is also feeling threatened. The war in the Middle East could lead to a world conflagration in which Europe might serve as a nuclear battlefield. In self-defense, Europeans want an end to the madness in that part of the world all too close to home. Yet every time a European leader—whether the Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky, or now the French president—attempts to contribute to a peaceful settlement, his country is subject to tirades from Begin and, worse, mysterious terrorist attacks.

"Who profits from the crime?" In a general way, there is broad agreement that the culprits are to be found among those forces who want to prevent France from playing an independent role in the Middle East. What better way to disqualify France for a mediator role than to attach the label "anti-Semitic" to its government and people?

For the first time, some people are saying openly what they only dared think to themselves after Rue Copernic—that the Israeli secret service Mossad cannot be automatically taken off the list of suspects. The Begin government has been frantically trying to keep the French from sending a peace-keeping force into Beirut. However, assuming that warning France to stay out of Lebanon is the most plausible motive for terrorist attacks on France, Israel is not the only power that could be so motivated.

As is becoming increasingly clear even in public statements by people such as Is-

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